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## TRUMP ADMINISTRATION TO REPURPOSE \$3.8 BILLION IN MILITARY FUNDS FOR BORDER SECURITY

*Democrats criticize transfer as an attempt to bypass Congress's appropriation authority*

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WASHINGTON – The Trump administration is moving to repurpose \$3.8 billion in military funds for building barriers along the U.S.-Mexico border, according to documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal.

The administration, which has already shifted \$6.7 billion toward barrier construction from across the government, is planning to divert a total of \$7.2 billion of military money toward border-wall construction this fiscal year.

The transfer takes Defense Department funds slated for new aircraft, naval ships and equipment for the National Guard, and puts them toward assisting the Department of Homeland Security, according to the documents.

"The Department of Defense continues to be a steadfast partner in our border-security mission," said acting Department of Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf. "Border security is homeland security and national security."

The Pentagon said Thursday that Defense Secretary Mark Esper approved the transfer of funding after receiving the request from the Department of Homeland Security last month.

"We will continue to support DHS and other agencies as needed to keep our homeland secure," said Lt. Col. Chris Mitchell, a Pentagon spokesman.

An administration official justified the move, saying all of the targeted military projects would still be left with more funding than the Pentagon had requested for them from Congress last year.

Democrats criticized Thursday's transfer as an attempt to bypass Congress's appropriation authority.

"The Constitution gives Congress, not the president, the power of the purse. Congress rejected President Trump's full request for wall funding, which is why he is now orchestrating this backdoor mechanism to prop up a political vanity project," top House Democratic appropriators said in a statement.

Rep. Mac Thornberry (R., Texas), the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee who is retiring, was also critical of the transfers, writing in a statement that it "undermines the principle of civilian control of the military and is in violation of the separation of powers within the Constitution."

"The reprogramming announced today is contrary to Congress's constitutional authority, and I believe that it requires Congress to take action," he said.

A partisan clash over the border wall, Mr. Trump's central campaign promise, sparked a historic 35-day government shutdown last year. Afterward, Congress committed to only provide the administration with \$1.375 billion in border-wall money and has provided the same total this year.

After the shutdown, Mr. Trump declared a state of emergency, allowing his administration to shift money from other parts of the government for wall construction. With the one-year state of emergency set to expire on Saturday, the president submitted a notice to the Federal Register on Thursday extending the state of emergency for one more year.

Congress has twice voted to cancel the national emergency, though the bipartisan majorities in each chamber have fallen short of veto-proof majorities.

The administration felt emboldened to move ahead with Thursday's Pentagon transfer after the Supreme Court and later a federal appeals court allowed interagency transfers to proceed pending further litigation.

The Pentagon money, along with about \$4.2 billion that Congress has put toward the wall over the past three years, will bring the Trump administration to the \$18 billion total it said in 2018 was the price tag to build its preferred style of border fencing, 30-foot steel bollards placed about 3 inches apart. That design allows border agents to see through to the other side and is designed to be tricky to climb.

In its budget request released Monday, the administration estimated the \$18 billion total would allow them to build about 1,000 miles of the wall, assuming Mr. Trump wins a second term and can see the project through.

So far, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which oversees the project, has reported building 108 miles of wall, though 107 of them replaced existing fencing or other barriers. Officials have said they hope to have about 450 miles completed or under construction by the end of 2020.

The administration has concentrated its construction efforts on federally-owned land, where it faces the fewest legal hurdles. Across swaths of the border, particularly in Texas, the administration is meeting resistance from private land owners unwilling to forfeit their property so that new sections of wall could be built on it.